

TRANSCRIPT—Sandie Rhodes

Fairview Community History Project

Interviewee: Sandie Rhodes

Interviewers: Tealey Ellis and Judith Robertson

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Tealey Ellis: When did you come to Fairview? What brought you here? And share some experiences that you've had.

Sandie Rhodes: We actually moved here in August of 2000. We had purchased our home here two years prior to that. My husband's parents moved from Chapel Hill to Asheville in 1993, three or four days before the blizzard. They were in a condo downtown, and they lost their power for I think seven days. But they were so touched by the people they didn't even know who came and brought them hot coffee and soup and everything, that they knew they wanted to make home here. So, they bought a house in Weaverville, and a few years later, their oldest son David and his wife Nancy moved to Fairview from Gloucester, MA, and they live on Sugar Hollow. So, we were living in Southern California, my husband Christopher and I. I knew I wouldn't live and die in California, I wanted to head back East. So, visiting on his dad's birthday every October 23, it's such a beautiful time here in the mountains. My heart was just tugging to be back East. So, my husband went to Bora Bora for three months—he's a musician—on a gig, and I came to Asheville and started looking around. I didn't see anything particularly that I wanted to recommend that we buy. But I checked all the different areas around, and I kept coming back to Fairview. And when I got back to California, within a day my sister-in-law called and told me a

house just down the street on Hollywood Road just went on the market. So, she looked at it and sent me pictures, and we made an offer. And then my husband came home, and we came here and we saw the house and that was it. Took us a couple of years to move. We rented it to someone who was building on Butler Mountain. And then we came and visited his dad when two years later after purchasing it and we just said, we got home and we said, We're ready. We had to wait until our tenants' lease was up, but that following August we moved. But unfortunately, his dad had passed away in that time. He had seen our home but wasn't here when we moved here. That's it, and it's home forever now. Couldn't imagine living anywhere else.

TE: What do you like most about Fairview, now that you've been here awhile?

SR: I think Fairview is a microcosm of everything good in people and towns and some of the bad, but I like how people deal with the bad.

TE: In what way?

SR: I think everyone here is very accepting. A friend of mine, a neighbor, many years ago, Cam Smail, said to me one time—his wife is a successful dentist and he was a developer—and he said to me, Do you know what I love about Fairview? He said, I go to our little post office, and the person in front of me is worth three million dollars, and the person behind me is living in a tent, and I'm in the middle, and you can't tell any of us apart. The accepting nature of people, and ready to jump in and help. Not looking for accolades or headlines, but just to help.

TE: I have found that to be true as well, and I've heard discussions from various people about what each of them think is the center of Fairview. And the post office is one of those places that is often mentioned as a center of Fairview. And that's a good example I think of the makeup as you were saying of the community as well.

SR: And Food Lion. See all my friends in Food Lion.

TE: When you first came here, coming from California was a big change. And I know that you liked the aura, the atmosphere of Fairview and what you thought it was going to be. But what was it like then for you in terms of businesses, amenities, services, things of that nature?

SR: Funny story about that. I'm a very organized person. Since we owned our house ahead of time, as I mentioned, I was taking the Citizen Times and looking at that. Just sort of getting a feel for everything. So when I knew we were moving, I got everything in place, phone service, and all of those things. I knew where the stores were. And the last thing I set out to do was to get high-speed Internet. Being a graphic designer and at that time I was publishing two trade magazines for a company in Los Angeles. I took that job with me here for a year. Of course, there was no high-speed Internet. Basically, my moving was predicated on the ability to do my job like that. So, I was the recipient of the very first satellite that was installed by hughes.net. The installer came from South Carolina, and he said, This is the first one of these I've put in up here. I was incredulous. And the other thing I recall, joking about with some of my friends. I'd say, We're here. It's beautiful. I just think it's so beautiful. And I'm four miles from a quart of milk and nine miles from Home Depot. And it seemed like so far, because I had been living in a tiny little beach town in California, and probably never went more than a half-mile from my house for anything.

TE: When would you date, if you will, when you started seeing some changes in Fairview?

SR: Interestingly, when we purchased our house, they had just started the construction of Mine Hole Gap, of the widening. And when we decided to move, they had just finished it. So, I missed that transition. But I would say I think the last seven, eight years have brought a lot of

change to Fairview. The housing market went up, went down, back up again. But I think also with the Southcliffs and I can't remember the name of the big development right at the top of Mine Hole Gap, the one that's open

Southcliff?

SR: It is Southcliff, I'm thinking of The Cliffs. After Southcliff opened and they brought water up the hill and everything, you started seeing more and more development. My husband and I are thrilled that we live where we do, because we don't think we'll ever see big development there, certainly not when you look up at the mountains that are all, most of them protected now in land conservancy. To have two little breweries in Fairview, and now we've got several antique stores, two more opening up. The Local Joint was a major addition to this community, because really there was just Angelo's was the only place to eat. And the Hot Dog King. So that brought people into Fairview that had never come down the road, really, because they heard about it, good breakfast place, etc. Whistle Hop Brewery and live music there. Things that I thought would come, seem to be coming quickly now.

TE: A new bakery is supposed to open.

SR: That's right.

TE: Hopefully soon. Quite interesting. When you started seeing the change, of Southcliff and other folks moving in from different parts of the country. As time has passed, what if any feedback from native Fairviewans have you heard in response to how they might feel about an influx of people from different parts of the country, or world.

SR: Right. I think the answer has to be qualified on which influx we're talking about. I find there's two groups of people who gravitate here. People like my husband and I, who just feel so grateful to be a part of this community and accept that there are people that do things

differently than we do. There are people that let their dogs run loose, there are people that litter, there are people that hunt, and they've been doing that for many, many years. They may not be our values and what we choose to do, but we chose to move here and we accept those differences. And then there's the folks that come here and see those things and set out, or believe, that they should change them, that they can talk some sense into people, etc. etc. And I would say that the latter group is not favorably looked on by locals or by people like myself. Many of them have contacted me because of the Town Crier to report things like dogs that are running loose all the time, or I followed someone and they threw litter out of their car and I have their license plate number, over the years. I have a bunch of funny stories about things like that.

TE: Well, speaking of someone throwing litter out of the car, I still as a relative newbie to Fairview, I've been impressed with the cleanliness overall. Every now and then you'll see some trash or something out but I think there's a pride, and that's where I wanted to go next. Have you seen any change in the sense of pride that Fairviewans have in this community changing much. And maybe you've addressed it a little bit already in the conflict you've been discussing.

SR: I think so, I think people in my life that I gravitate to and form friendships with are of a like mind with myself. And I know that when people here are active, they walk and they ride bikes and hike. And incorporated in that is a sense of pride. I know that when my husband and I walk down Hollywood Road every morning, we carry a Food Lion bag, we pick up trash. It's just an easy thing to do, and all of my friends are like that. They'll see someone in distress or potential distress on the road. There was a situation yesterday where someone was walking by herself, and my friend on the way to the airport texted me. I went out and met her. I texted my sister-in-law who was walking her dog from the other side, just to make sure everything was OK.

And that's the way people are here. I think that some local people that I have come across have not accepted and embraced that people who have moved here can be of the same ilk. One of the other things about the mountains that I've discovered and that I like is a sense of privacy. I think that if you read the French Broad or any of the historical books about the area, people that gravitated to the mountains did so because they wanted to get away from something, someone, whatever, and that sense of privacy is something that I admire and it frustrates me at the same time. The admire part is easy. Frustrated because you find out someone really was in need that you care about and you know and, Why didn't you tell me, I would have helped, and people are just very self-sufficient, self-reliant, and I just think that living in such a beautiful place with just the history of the mountains and a feeling of being in the mountains, I think if you stay here it's because you belong.

TE: If you were asked to write either an advertisement or to do a commercial if you will, encouraging or to promote Fairview, what do you think it might consist of?

SR: Now would that be to get more people to move here? No.

TE: Maybe just to promote Fairview, to come and enjoy the businesses that we do have, or to just come for the day. I guess the question is, how would you promote Fairview. What are its qualities that you see today that might lure, entice people to come for the day, or the week, or to move here?

SR: A few years back some friends of mine told me about a project they had started, Fall in Love with Fairview, and they were going to do just that. They were going to put together some vacation rentals and Trout Lily Market and Troyer's Amish Country Blatz and Hickory Nut Gap Farm and pull together the many things that we have in our community that a lot of people just even down the road aren't even aware of. I guess community is really what it's about. The

business community integrates with the residential community. The Fairview Business Association has a hundred and five members. They're all neighbors. I think what I would have would be the businesses I just mentioned as well as some of the beautiful sights—the waterfall on Flat Top Mountain Road, just some rocks where water comes down, but everybody knows it. Some of our hikes, community center. The Spring Mountain Community Center has won so many awards for community-based improvements they've done, collecting Food for Fairview and for Dog Rescue. What Fairview is besides having large swaths of land protected, thanks to people like John Ager and some others. So, our natural landscape has been preserved luckily in time, I think. The people are beautiful, and the sense of community is, and I think it would be Fall in Love With Fairview. Come spend a couple of days here and go to the Amish market and sit on the front porch and have the biggest sandwich you've gotten anywhere.

TE: Well, tell us how Town Crier came to be?

SR: I wasn't here when it started. But in 1997 Annie Ager, John Ager our representative's wife, published a two-page newsletter I think, on 8 ½ by 11 paper. I think it was just to communicate. There was a lot going on in the community with new people coming back then, and a lot of, I think some tensions also between things such as zoning, no zoning, and bringing a library here versus a bookmobile that had been here. And I don't know the content of the early newsletter, but I know that there was a lot going on and the community was becoming somewhat splintered. I imagine knowing Annie that was part of her impetus was to just communicate information to people. There was a woman, Terry Owensby, who has passed away, sadly, but she was just a bundle of energy and she said to Annie, We need a newspaper. I can sell advertising, and so she did. A gentleman named Mike Patterson, who I haven't actually met, he's moved since but still on our subscription list, he said, Well, I can be the publisher. The paper was

formed, and they went for a nonprofit status, which was granted, and the mission statement is very much what I was explaining. I imagine Annie's intent was to communicate information to the entire community. We mail to every household once a month, free. And to support local businesses, local nonprofits, and that was it.

TE: You mentioned this and I made a note to see if we could find out if Annie Ager's two-page newsletter might still be around anywhere, whether she has a copy of it.

SR: The earliest paper I have, I think, is '98. But I will ask her.

TE: OK. And that, the '98 copy that you said you have, as we mentioned earlier, could be scanned, and I think that would be really neat to have in the archives as well. You impress me as an individual who, wherever you might have lived over time, that you were always involved in whatever was going on and making things happen as well. What are other things you are involved with ? I know that you stepped back some from the Town Crier, but I suspect you aren't just sitting home knitting.

SR: Actually, I've stepped back from everything. Except the Town Crier. I'm still publisher but just from home, to oversee for the new team in place. I have fifteen years of information in my brain. It started out in '03 when I took the newspaper over, and I was pretty much doing everything back then. Well, over the years I got involved with the Asheville Downtown Association and the Asheville Independent Restaurant Association. They had been formed and then they started to splinter, they were having trouble holding onto members, and so they hired me, and I went out and spoke to all the restaurant owners, the ones who were members, the ones who weren't. We put together a dining guide, which I designed and had printed, so that people coming to Asheville could see the number of independent restaurants. That is, of course, a big calling for Asheville as a major city is that there's not a whole bunch of

chain restaurants there. Some years after that I was hired to be the parade director for the Asheville Holiday Parade. I did that for six years. I worked with Goodwill and through a local agency here in Fairview, a neighbor friend, on spreading the message of Goodwill, the back story in the Asheville market, because they're based in Winston-Salem. I started Color Me Goodwill, which is an event that they still put on every year as a fundraiser with upcycled clothing designers, they get a gift card to shop in Goodwill and they are assigned a color and put together a fashion show of five or six things, and one of the models in each color group is always someone who has come through the Goodwill programs, so that's pretty neat. And then of course the Town Crier since 2003. We've grown in staff and geographic region that we cover, because as Fairview used to be just Fairview, as Reynolds started to get more developed, it was just sort of reached out. And then Fletcher, there's probably six or seven hundred houses that a Fairview address for many years that suddenly had a Fletcher address, because I think the number of homes in Fairview grew so much that our post office couldn't handle it. So, they made new routes for Fletcher. Still people there who say, I have a Fletcher address, but I'm a Fairviewan. So, when I first was involved with the paper, I think we were delivering about 4500 newspapers a month, and now that's 8500, since 2003. The May issue of 2003 was the first time that I was physically in the newspaper. I had been doing some freelance writing. We had a hailstorm on May 15th of that year. I had never seen hail bigger than a grain of rice maybe. I'm from New York originally. Certainly, there wasn't a lot on Southern California. My husband was born in Dallas. So, I remember standing in our kitchen with a skylight over us and the patio doors in front of us, and it just kept getting bigger and louder and bigger and louder. And I was like, Oh my goodness, what is going on, Chris come here. And on the front page of the May issue you see

my hand holding a hail stone the size, bigger than a golf ball, and my other hand holding a quarter just to show. And that's how I broke into the newspaper business.

TE: What would you, what would be your best overall experience with the Town Crier.

SR: Going to the post office box to pick up the mail and finding a tiny envelope with scribbly handwriting and inside a paper napkin that said would you please put this in the paper. This is my grandbaby and she's—I'm going to cry—she's going to be three. And there was a picture. And every year this grandmother sent me her granddaughter's picture to put in the paper. Her name was Brandy, still is Brandy. Since she turned sixteen, I haven't gotten any pictures anymore. And that to me is what the Crier is about. And one of the challenges over the years as the paper has grown and we need more resources, people to work on it to put it out. Twenty-four pages was big when I started the paper, and now we're hard-pressed to go below forty pages. So that's just a lot more work, and we had more businesses, too, so we have more advertising, and one of the challenges is to keep the paper local. We get press releases now from entertainment venues in Cherokee. I guess when you Google local newspapers in Asheville we come up. We stay true to our mission and at the same time cherry-pick events we choose to put in our calendar, because we know that they're of interest to people that live here. There's a group that knits for babies, for premature babies, and everything, and they sometimes meet an hour away from here, but I know there's a lot of knitters in this community that can work, so we keep that, things like that in the paper, try to periodically have things going on elsewhere, opportunities and events.

TE: Thank you for that. That just pleases me greatly to hear the thought that goes into what's going to be in the paper and keeping it local. I appreciate that a whole lot. Are

there any areas that we haven't touched on, or a question that we haven't asked that you would like to share?

SR: Well, one additional thing. When I was in California in 1993, I was fortunate enough to get connected with a group of people that were petitioning the City of Redondo Beach to get the first official dog park opened. There was land that belonged to the power company that was under power lines that was next to a park already. They were the activists and they went and actually got a six-month trial for this dog park, which is when I got involved. We opened the dog park and we became a model for a lot of other dog parks that then opened. So I had actually come to Asheville and met with them when they were, the people were starting this park. They had contacted me. But that gets me back to when I moved here. Fairview doesn't need a dog park because we have land, and I've already spoken about the differences and there were a lot of dogs living on chains, living tied up, and then the others who are cared for, like pets, family members. One good thing that the Town Crier has been able to do, that we did with the dog park, was my dream for the dog park was to start a large adoption fair. So, two years after the park was opened, I created Pooch-a-rama, which was the first Sunday of the month. We had up to fifteen rescue groups. I'm in marketing and promotion my whole life, so it was easy for me to package it and brand it. We had people, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people coming when I left, and it's still going on to this day, and hundreds of dogs adopted each month. So how can I bring that need to help critters here and the Town Crier has been the tool. It started where we would put a lost dog or lost kitty's picture on the front page. Invariably that pet would be found, in a few cases sadly by the side of the road but most often a happy ending. There was a woman when we started the adoption page where we were running pictures of dogs. Another heartbreaker story. I woman called me up. Actually the rescue group called me up, she said, This woman came in to

our adoption fair. She arrived at 8 o'clock, it was at Pet Smart, she said, she was waving a Town Crier, and she said, This is my dog. I have to have this dog. It was a little, kind of odd-looking beagle that was maybe four or five years old. Then about ten years later that same woman called me and said, I adopted the beagle and she's passed away and I would love to write something about what she meant to me. And she did and we published it. And since the paper edition had done such good work, our Facebook page now has become a bulletin board literally for lost pets. We post it there, and there are seven or eight or nine people who are actively in rescue that know where to put things out. They pick it up, they repost it. We have such a high success rate for reuniting families with their pets, and that just makes me feel good.

TE: As it should. Judith, do you have any more questions?

Judith Robertson: No, I think you've done a great job.

TE: I believe that Fairview was extremely fortunate when you made the decision to buy a home and move here. I've just heard your name so many times in the four years I've lived here about things that you've been involved in and done. So this interview has been extremely pleasurable today, and thank you for sitting for it.

SR: Thank you very much for doing this project.

JR: I'll just add that when we first moved here, the Fairview Crier was one of the first things we discovered about the community. We were blown away with it. We have the best community newspaper in the world.

TE: I've enjoyed it very much, too, and I'm one of the Town Crier volunteer labelers as well.

SR: Oh, thank you. I should have mentioned that we still rely on volunteers, to get a little newsprint on your hands.

TE: I enjoy it, to get to meet different people, and it make me feel your Town Crier, I still call it yours, but your Town Crier gives me the opportunity to give something back to the community as well, and that's a nice opportunity for people to have. Thank you again for this interview.

SR: You're welcome. Thank you.

[interview stops]

JR: This is continuing the interview with Sandie Rhodes on 27 September 27th, 2018

SR: We were talking about the Town Crier being one of the centers of the community. Several years back, I had the desire to enlarge on that, if I could, and I saw a need for people that live down at this end of Fairview, a place to fax or scan or get some copies made or buy a gift etc, etc. We were subletting a tiny little space for the Town Crier, just enough for two desks. A larger space became available and the owners, the new owners of the building who own Americare Pharmacy. I was talking to Patrick Bryan about my dream, if you will, about creating a hub in Fairview. He had been actively looking for a tenant and he came back to me a couple days later and said, I like your idea. He's a contractor and he renovated all the space, created a meeting room which is there. The Town Crier has half of the office side, and The Hub has faxing and scanning and all sorts of office services. You can get posters printed or order rubber stamps. It became a local, locally crafted gift shop so everything in there is by people that live in the community. We have an art gallery as well, we have many famous, well-known artists in Fairview that have galleries in the River Arts District. That took care of the problem of the blank walls in the meeting room. While I have retired, I have found someone that is carrying on The Hub, so it remains there and the Town Crier is part of the larger Hub now.

TE: I think that was a great idea, because it gives artists in the community an opening, an avenue to get their items out there so I'm sure they're most appreciative.

JR: We've shopped there, haven't we?

TE: Yes we have.

JR: Well, thank you for adding that.

SR: Sure.

END OF INTERVIEW

Philip Blocklyn, 13 May 2020